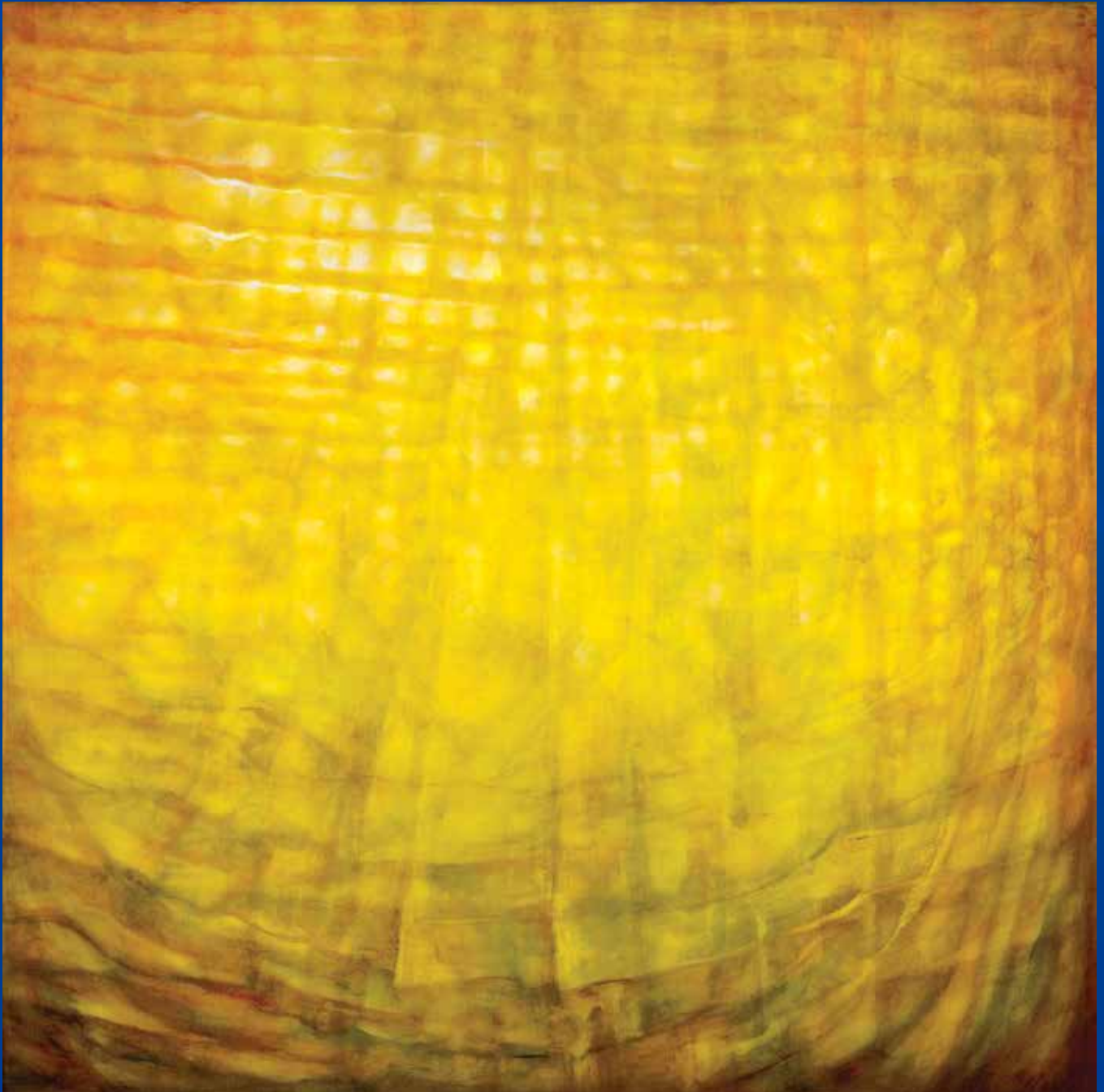


presence

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION • VOL. 23, NO. 4 • DECEMBER 2017



Spiritual Friendship in the Ancient Wisdom Tradition of Buddhism
Cultivating Spiritual Discernment through the Quaker Clearness Committee
Spiritual Direction with Victims and Survivors of Abuse



Seeking Connection

April 26-29

2018

www.sdievents.org

St. Louis, Missouri, USA

presence

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

ARTICLES

Spiritual Friendship in the Ancient Wisdom Tradition of
Buddhism: A Reflection
Joshin Brian Byrnes

6

The Challenge of Real Change:
Spiritual Direction, Pilgrimage and Dreams
Kirsten Backstrom

13

Deep Speaks to Deep: Cultivating Spiritual
Discernment through the Quaker Clearness Committee
Valerie Brown

20

Blurring the Boundaries: Paradox in the Spirituality of the
Desert Mothers and Fathers
Richard Bonacci

31

Spiritual Direction – Relationship as Inclusivity
Debonee Morgan

40

The Art from Pose to Prose:
Art and Movement in Spiritual Direction
Ingrid Hauss

48

Spiritual Direction with Victims and Survivors of Abuse
Kathleen Hope Brown

56

FEATURES

Focus

3

Letters to the Editor

4

About Our Authors

5

About Our Poets and Artists

63

Reviews

64

POETRY

Landscape Taken While Looking Up through Cedar
Sarah Rehfeldt

12

Hafez 448
Mario Petrucci

30

Twin Flames (A Pantoum)
Alexandra Martin

39



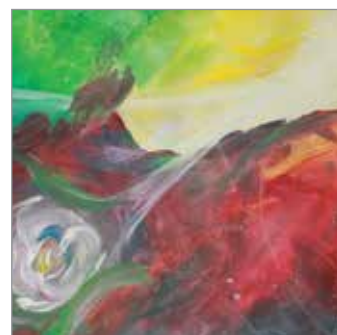
8



16



23



31

presence

AN INTERNATIONAL
JOURNAL OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Publisher
Spiritual Directors International

Executive Director
Anil Singh-Molares, MTS

Editor
Nick Wagner

Media Review Editor
Pegge Erkeneff

Art Editor and Graphic Designer
Tobias Becker

Founding Editor
Susan S. Jorgensen, MA

Poetry Editor
Jennifer (Jinks) Hoffmann

EDITORIAL REVIEW PANEL

Lauren Artress, PhD
Walnut Creek, California, USA

Wilkie Au, PhD
Redondo Beach, California, USA

Peter Ball
Ramsbury, Wiltshire, England

William Barry, SJ, PhD
Weston, Massachusetts, USA

Philip Carter
Adlinga Beach, SA, Australia

Mary Ann Clifford
Rodriguez, RSM
Burlingame, California, USA

Jill Hawk Clupper,
MDiv
Edmond, Oklahoma, USA

Rebecca L. Damron,
PhD
Stephenville, TX, USA

Joseph Driskill, PhD
London, Ontario, Canada

Suzanne Dunbar, MA
Belconnen, ACT, Australia

Tilden H. Edwards,
PhD
Bethesda, Maryland, USA

Robert Gardenhire III,
MDiv
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Douglas Gregg, PhD
Henderson, Nevada, USA

Douglas S. Hardy
Leawood, Kansas, USA

Wil Hernandez, PhD
Arcadia, California, USA

Dwight Judy, PhD
Syracuse, Indiana, USA

Valerie Lesniak, PhD
Seattle, Washington, USA

Sandra Lommasson, MA
Sacramento, California, USA

Carol Ludwig, MA
Vero Beach, Florida, USA

Jill Manton
Somers, Victoria, Australia

Diane M. Millis, PhD
Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Cathy Murtha, DW
Bay Shore, New York, USA

Jung Eun Sophia Park,
SNJM
Alameda, California, USA

Susan S. Phillips, PhD
Berkeley, California, USA

Michael Plattig,
OCarm, PhD
Muenster, Germany

Susan Rakoczy, IHM, PhD
Hilton, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Janet Ruffing,
RSM, PhD
Hamden, Connecticut, USA

Joyce Rupp, OSM
Des Moines, Iowa, USA

Frederick W. Schmidt,
PhD
Glen Ellyn, Illinois, USA

Gordon Self, DMin
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Rabbi Jacob Staub, PhD
Blue Bell, Pennsylvania, USA

John Stuart
Frankston, Victoria, Australia

Steven Sturm, DMin
Waialua, Hawaii, USA

Sally Taylor
Trail, British Columbia, Canada

Therese Taylor-Stinson
Silver Spring, Maryland, USA

Stephen Truscott, SM
Nedlands, Western Australia, Australia

Jane Vennard, MDiv
Denver, Colorado, USA

Wendy M. Wright,
PhD
Santa Barbara, CA, USA

Marika Zelča-Čerāne,
MBA, MA
Riga, Latvia

About Presence *Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction* is published in March, June, September, and December. *Presence* offers a forum among diverse people and spiritual traditions for the exploration of present and future trends in the art and ministry of spiritual direction. *Presence* is grounded in the belief that our deepest calling is to be present to one another as we share the gift of ourselves. *Presence* strives to articulate the essential elements of contemplative practices, formation, and training; to encourage accountability; and to develop clear ethical guidelines. *Presence* supports a global contemplative dialog of spiritual care and compassion for others, ourselves, and the whole cosmos. ISSN 1081-7662

Opinions expressed in this journal are the opinions of the authors and advertisers and may not represent the opinions of Spiritual Directors International, the coordinating council, or the editors. All biblical quotations are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted.

Spiritual Directors International Mission Statement

Throughout human history individuals have been inspired to accompany others seeking the Mystery that many name God. SDI is a learning community that educates and supports this service around the world and across traditions.

Subscriptions Individual: USD\$42.95 per year / USD\$77.95 for two years; Institutional: USD\$52.95 per year / USD\$96.95 for two years; Outside USA: USD\$52.95 per year for individuals / USD\$96.95 for two years; USD\$60.95 per year for institutions; no discounts available. For rates in other currencies, contact office@sdiworld.org.

Subscriptions, inquiries, and changes of address should be sent to: Spiritual Directors International, PO Box 3584, Bellevue, WA 98009-3584 USA. Telephone: (425) 455-1565; Fax: (425) 455-1566. E-mail: office@sdiworld.org.

Advertising To receive our advertising package, which includes our policy and rate sheets, please write to the Editor, *Presence*, PO Box 3584, Bellevue, WA 98009-3584; or call (425) 455-1565. Our rate sheet is also available at www.sdiworld.org.

Editorial Inquiries Manuscripts, letters, and comments should be sent to the Editor. You may contact the editor at: editor@sdiworld.org.

Reprint Policy Copies of articles may be made for educational purposes without written permission of the editor, provided that the number of copies made does not exceed 100, and proper credit is given.

Media and Book Reviews Contact Media Review Editor, reviews@sdiworld.org for more information. Do not send books to the Bellevue office.

Visit the website for more information about spiritual direction: www.sdiworld.org.



Spiritual Directors International publications are printed by a Forest Stewardship Council certified press.



The Challenge of Real Change: Spiritual Direction, Pilgrimage, and Dreams

Kirsten Backstrom

In a spiritual direction session, Angela tells me that she has been struggling. Someone vandalized her car; she slipped in the shower and fractured her wrist; there's stress in her marriage and with her children; her job is unsatisfying; her father has dementia and must be moved to a care facility; and she is feeling disconnected from God and herself. For a while, she just needs to vent. She expresses her frustrations, fears, sadness, fatigue, and hopelessness; blames herself and others; becomes tearful; sighs; and lapses into silence. I listen, encourage and trust her, and wait. In a little while, she begins to draw on her inner resources and suggests some ways around this apparent dead end. She is self-aware and has a sense of humor that helps her to step back from her own limiting stories—yet soon, she feels stuck again. She is trying to solve her problems, yet these are not really problems that can be solved. She says she does not understand what is expected of her. What should she do?

We need to change our approach, so we look at one of her recent dreams. “I am climbing an endless staircase that gets steeper and steeper until I'm afraid I'll fall off,” Angela says. She describes the dream using some of the same language she used when describing her waking life. As we explore the dream, we find ourselves considering her waking experiences as if they were dreams as well, seeing these challenging life events as steps in a meaningful process. The fear of “falling off” is as real in her waking life as it is in the dream. How is Spirit guiding her through these experiences? As we explore alternative perspectives, something shifts, and she seems to be relaxing.

There's a long silence. And then, suddenly and smoothly, everything looks different. She realizes that her dream allows possibilities that would not be literally available in waking life, and she imagines herself “letting go, falling into emptiness ... until the falling becomes flying!” Now she can describe her life situation in a new way. She is free to let go of the “steep staircase” of her fears and frustrations; she is free to fly. Her transformation takes me by surprise. All at once, she makes connections, sees possibilities, and lets go of the idea that she must figure out her

life. She can trust that she is a child of God and that these experiences are opening her heart even though they have been painful. She is still feeling the sorrow of her losses and the reality of her concerns, and her life is still “up in the air”—but she is flying. She cannot explain it, but something is fundamentally different.

The session ends with a deep peace between us. I go home knowing I have witnessed authentic change. Another session might have included all of the same elements but simply resulted in a more positive approach to difficult problems—yet, for some reason, this time, there was a life-changing breakthrough. Often in spiritual direction, there is insight, renewal, hope, peace—but true change is rare, and it feels like grace. It seems to come out of nowhere, but it has actually been working within the person's soul, sometimes for years, before it breaks into awareness.

When Angela returns for our next session, I do not know what to expect, and neither does she. We start from a new place.

In order to follow Angela as she makes this leap of faith into a new way of being, I must be capable of similar transformative leaps myself. As a spiritual director, working with people who courageously follow where Spirit leads them, I must recognize authentic change when I see it and let myself listen at the deepest level. I must change my perception of the spiritual directee as she changes, and I must be willing to be changed myself.

So, in this article, I would like to explore how deep change happens in my life and what this teaches me about being present with my spiritual directees. I want to acknowledge the Mystery of the transformative process and let it lead me in unexpected directions. Following the guidance of such Mystery is like setting out on a journey with a sacred destination in a strange land, a journey where I will not be comfortable and will not have answers to most of my questions. Here we go.

What Does Real Change Look Like?

Whenever I offer a workshop related to spirituality, I begin by stating my intentions for the event, and these



intentions always include the hope that we will learn something new. Perhaps participants will find new insights in whatever I have to say, or perhaps they will learn from one another. Often, learnings occur “between the lines,” when something I suggest in the group sparks ideas I could not have anticipated. And, of course, I always learn as well. Sometimes, what I learn is a new approach to teaching, a new way of inviting people into a practice or process. Often, participants use images or tell stories that speak to me and give me a new perspective on my own life.

Reminding ourselves that we might learn something new implies that we are opening up. But how much change are we really willing or able to accept? Are we actually learning new things or just adjusting our focus on the things we already think we know? In spiritual direction or spiritual workshops, there is a sincere invitation to mutual discovery (in a time and place set apart as sacred), which means that those who accept the invitation could be genuinely changed by the experience. If we open ourselves to Spirit, to one another, and to unfamiliar ideas, we tacitly agree to question our own assumptions and see the world differently. Easier said than done!

Children build their systems of thought from scratch, creating new categories and developing a whole new understanding of reality as new data comes in. But by the time we are adults, we have some pretty elaborate internal cataloguing systems in place, so there are plenty of ways to shelve new information without really changing our minds. It is funny how the new stuff tends to conform to the stuff that is already there! If we do not have a shelf for it in our system of thought, then it either gets discarded or reshaped to fit. Most new information just gets added to preestablished categories. So, I am afraid that when I talk about “learning something new,” it is mostly just a suggestion that we stretch our intricate self-reinforcing identities a bit. Nothing wrong with that. But what if we want to go further?

Honestly, I want to do more than “learn something new.” I want to be capable of real growth and change, as children are. Most of the people I see in spiritual direction are also trying to open their minds and hearts to authentic, meaningful growth and change. Since I work primarily with spiritual directees who are spiritual directors or therapists themselves, there is an unspoken com-

mitment to go deeper, to stretch our self-concepts so that we can be fully present for the depth work of others. We start by engaging with this process intellectually, but how do we truly go beyond our preconceptions, trusting Spirit and our deeper wisdom to continually evolve our understanding of ourselves, our lives, and the world we share?

Dying and Becoming

When my mother came to the end of her life, she struggled more and more because she had become so set in her ways. She knew who she was, what she liked and did not like, what was possible for her and what was not, how she wanted other people to be and what she wanted them to do ... and those attitudes trapped her. When things did not go her way, she was miserable, and so were those who loved her. I loved her, and I also saw how easy it would be for me to be exactly like her in this. I am set in my ways. I know who I am, what I like and do not like, what is possible for me and what is not, how I want other people to be and what I want them to do. I can easily get stuck in my life, and this needs to change.

Shortly before my mother died, she dropped her desire to control everything and just let herself love and be loved. She changed her mind—becoming the flexible and beautiful, open-hearted being she was meant to be (and really had been all along), someone who experienced each new moment as a new beginning. She changed authentically, by freeing herself of the idea that she was something in particular. She let go of the belief that her life had to conform to her own categories. And when she recognized that she was going to die, she freed herself of her self-imposed limitations.

Can I do the same? If I can be truly flexible, I can support others in spiritual direction to change at the deepest level. Can I really learn something new—changing the very ways of conceptualizing my life that keep me from being surprised and delighted by the world around me? When Mom was dying, I asked myself this. And I decided to follow her lead.

Really changing, really becoming new, is a kind of dying. I want to grow beyond my established identity by challenging my own assumptions about who I am. At this time in my life, I am looking for real change. So I decided to make a pilgrimage.



Choosing the Camino

The Camino de Santiago is an ancient Christian pilgrimage that has become increasingly interfaith in recent years. There are hundreds of different Camino routes, all culminating in the small city of Santiago de Compostela, Spain. I chose the Camino specifically because I had earlier rejected it, believing it just was not for me. I had always seen myself as someone drawn to solitary wilderness retreats and deep, inner journeys ... and the Camino is emphatically popular, even crowded. Astonishing numbers of people from all over the world walk the commonest route (the Camino Francés), and the numbers practically double every year. This is hardly a wilderness retreat! Paradoxically, however, the very things that made me originally reject the Camino became exactly what made it realistic, and appropriate, for me.

Because of the route's popularity, there is a well-developed support system in place for pilgrims. The inexpensive *albergues* (hostels) all along the way make it possible to carry a fairly light backpack and stay in safe locations every night without spending too much money. I have health issues that prevent me from carrying heavy gear and supplies, and my financial resources are limited—so these support systems would be a godsend. And what about those hordes of people, speaking dozens of different languages, crowding the bathrooms and bunk beds, and sharing the trail with me every day? Well, because they would be a challenge for me, they were really the best reason of all for traveling halfway around the world and walking almost five hundred miles.

I imagined that this journey would force me to confront all of the ways that I resist change, and it certainly did. On day one, I found myself stalled in an airless airplane for three and a half hours before the twelve-hour flight even got off the ground, and then my luggage (one backpack, containing everything I needed for two months) was lost in the airport.

When I finally reached the beginning of the Camino itself, in the foothills of the French Pyrénées (with backpack recovered), I faced all of my fears. I developed a respiratory infection that lasted three weeks, so I was staggering twelve or fifteen miles a day with an unrelenting cough and ended up in a clinic relying upon (and sometimes imposing upon) kind strangers. The food was unfamiliar and upset my digestion. I found I could not

get much rest in the crowded hostels and became severely exhausted. My Spanish deserted me when I needed it most: I knew some words, but my mispronunciations and hoarse whisper made me unintelligible. When the infection cleared up, it left me almost deaf for another couple of weeks, so I could not easily take part in the animated conversations going on among the pilgrims all around me.

I trudged on, chanting under my breath, "It is beautiful. I am glad to be here. I am grateful, well, and strong." I did not feel it, but I knew it was true. Many sections of the route, sometimes for days at a time, were industrial wastelands around cities—not beautiful at all. Yet I could feel that I was being changed, and there was a deep beauty in every difficult moment of the journey. My homesickness was a longing not just for my home in Portland, Oregon, USA—but a longing to be at home within myself, to be at home in the midst of every new experience in every place I passed through.

Every day demanded a fresh start. When I adjusted to walking in rain and mud, the weather turned hot and dry. When I started to make friends, we moved at different paces and soon lost each other along the way. When, exhausted by early afternoon, I found a good *albergue* and unrolled my sleeping bag, got a warm shower, had some supper and some decent sleep at last, I had to move on to a new path and a new set of challenges the next morning. In a state of perpetual disorientation, I struggled between the sublime moments of grace (magnificent vistas, wonderful people, peaceful interludes) and the mundane misery of being sick and lonely and not knowing whether there would be a bed available for me each night or a shop open when I needed to buy food or medicine.

Encountering unavoidably difficult and painful experiences can make real change possible. When I was forced to relinquish my beliefs about who I am and what I need, I discovered that I can be both strong and fragile, connected and isolated, heroic and ridiculous, courageous and desperately afraid—and often all of these at once.

How Do We Change?

When I walked the Camino, I had a fairly good idea *what* I was going to encounter, and I prepared accordingly, but could have no idea *how* I would meet these





challenges. That was the whole point. I chose this journey because it presented exactly the kinds of difficulties I go out of my way to avoid encountering in my daily life, including extreme physical discomfort and lack of privacy, control, and basic amenities. Without a significant undertaking like a pilgrimage, I would (naturally!) have continued to avoid discomfort and deprivation, becoming increasingly stuck in the belief that my survival and happiness depend upon keeping my life just as it is.

I have seen a lot of the suffering that happens when people become incapable of deeper change. In spiritual direction, hospice work, and pastoral care with elders, I meet people who are encountering critical and acute transitions in their life circumstances, physical bodies, social roles, and personal relationships. I have seen their efforts to hold onto ways of being that worked in the past, and I have seen these efforts become increasingly painful, exhausting, and fruitless. When change is forced upon us, it can make us more rigid, desperate, and unhappy.

But I have also seen how many people, after struggling for a while, begin to open up to the process. I have witnessed some profound and beautiful transformations. When the time is right, change can happen with miraculous ease—and a whole new potential for life becomes available. My spiritual directees often intentionally place themselves in situations that will take them out of their comfort zones and then meet the challenges they fear by redefining themselves. I walk with them, as I walked along with thousands of other pilgrims on the Camino, and as I walked with my mother when she was getting ready to die. We are in this together. I am stunned by the grace of this transformative process and the courage of those who are willing to grow into the unknown.

Flexibility Is Essential

Is deep, authentic change really possible? Yes. But it rarely happens as a result of self-improvement practices, however helpful. Tidying up, journaling, repeating affirmations, making lists, exercising, practicing random acts of kindness, visualizing positive outcomes, and attending workshops can be valuable in themselves—they may even make us better people—but they are unlikely to change us at the core.

Real change has a different kind of value. We do not need to change to make ourselves “better.” We do not

need to fix ourselves. But we need to have the fundamental capacity to change because life is all about change. According to Buddhism, suffering happens when we respond (as we all do) to life’s impermanence and unpredictability by trying to have our own way. If we get used to any particular routine (even good habits), attached to any particular idea (even if it is true), or dependent on any particular comforts (even if they are healthy), then we are certainly going to have a difficult time when those patterns are disrupted, those ideas are contradicted, and those comforts are withdrawn. Since change is inevitable—as aging, illness, loss, and death are part of life itself—flexibility is essential.

Developing patterns and attachments may be perfectly natural, yet our well-being depends on our ability to recognize when we are becoming habituated and hooked, to notice when we are losing that essential flexibility. It is vital that we open up to change at a deep level, so that we can adapt to the changes that will invariably happen to us. And so, in the midst of our lives, we must renew ourselves; we must let go of our certainties and enter into the unknown.

Pilgrimage Practice

Pilgrimage is about transformation. The idea of making a pilgrimage is tremendously appealing to many, many people (as the crowds on the Camino testify) because deep change satisfies an essential longing. When we change at a deep level, we transcend our small lives and feel the embrace of Spirit—the vastness of the divine intention that created us.

One day, toward the end of my Camino pilgrimage, I reached the limits of my ability to cope with all that I was encountering. I was just too fragile and frightened. The morning began in darkness and pouring rain. I lost the trail on the side of a mountain and wandered in circles. When I finally found my way, the trail, and the rain, went on and on—and I thought my body would give out. My hip hurt. My heart labored. I could not stop shivering. I knew I had pushed too hard, but there was no place to stop. The albergue where I had planned to stay was closed. The villages appeared to be abandoned. It kept raining, and the trail seemed to run uphill all the way. Other pilgrims were struggling, too, and we smiled at each other, asked “You okay?”—but then we were on our own again.



When I recited prayers to myself—the 23rd Psalm, some Hindu songs of praise, and Buddhist *gathas* (walking prayers)—the tears just flowed. The ominous clouds, the green valleys of patterned pastures, and the brave, soggy pilgrims, were all, somehow, magnificent. Finally, I realized that all I had to do in the world was take the next step. I did not have to prove anything or be anything. Finally, I opened my heart all the way to the beauty of the natural world around me, to God, to my fellow pilgrims and the local people, and to every other being on the earth who is in this with me. I walked and walked and walked.

We walk toward a sacred destination when we make a pilgrimage, but it is not Santiago, or any other specific holy site. It is the same sacred destination we are always approaching in our lives: the center of

ourselves, where Spirit meets the uniqueness of each individual being. In spiritual direction, we make a small (and sometimes very significant) pilgrimage. We seek transformation, meaning, and authenticity.

Pilgrimage is intrinsically difficult, because it invites us out of our familiar identities, and introduces us to the unknown. And, on a pilgrimage, we are never alone. We are with Spirit and also with others. We walk a path that countless others have walked before us. We encounter others on the way who have stepped out of their own roles and habits to meet us. This is extraordinary, but it is also as ordinary as my “pilgrimage” to the library this afternoon, where I met God in the librarian, and in the kid who opened a door for me, and in the guy who was complaining about the traffic, and in the array of individuals who wrote all those books on the shelves around me. If we see our lives as a pilgrimage, every encounter can be meaningful, and we are changed at the core by everyone we meet.

Dreaming a New Reality

In spiritual direction, and in my personal spiritual practice, I work with dreams because they can be a guiding gift and a catalyst for real change. Dreams take us deeper than we can go with our familiar conscious minds.

Many religious traditions value dreams as communications from Spirit, because dreams have the capacity to guide us beyond where we would go on our own.

If I start thinking that I understand my life, or the lives of my spiritual directees, my dreams may keep me humble by offering me confusion and absurdity. If I feel despair or frustration, my dreams may offer me openings into a kind of beauty I could never have imagined. If I take myself too seriously, dreams can make me laugh. If I am tired, my dreams can give me peace, or encourage me to rouse myself. And, more often than not, my dreams know what I need better than I know myself. I might think I need comfort—and I receive a challenge to try harder. I might think I deserve punishment—and I receive grace. Dreams, like pilgrimages, have the capacity to surprise me, so

*Dreams,
like pilgrimages,
have the capacity
to surprise me. . . .*

when I listen to dreams I find the stiff clay of my personality being sculpted into truly remarkable new shapes.

In spiritual direction, there is always the potential for real change. We listen to our dreams—the parts of us that know more than our conscious minds. And we follow our inner pilgrimage—the journey that takes us into the unknown. And together, we feel the flexibility of Spirit, and the possibilities that life offers us.

Backward and Onward

For months after completing my pilgrimage, I dreamed that I was still walking. The journey had changed me deeply and authentically, but coming home to the comfort of my own bed and my own routines tempted me to let those changes fade into memories. So my dreams kept taking me back, making me walk again through the wheat fields, old villages, olive orchards, dusty ruins, mountain pastures, industrial wastelands, and eucalyptus forests, in chilly rain and sweltering heat, on that endless, muddy, steep, rocky, exhausting, miserable, lonely, lovely road again—allowing me to reexperience all the struggles and discoveries on the way.

One particular dream lasted a whole night and turned me around completely:



Long Day on the Backward Camino: Suddenly, I have the opportunity to walk the Camino again, and although I am unprepared, I set out at dawn. Most shops are closed in the tiny villages I pass through, so I cannot buy the supplies I need. I will have to make do with what I have got. I am still wearing the boots I wore for my first five-hundred-mile journey, and I am afraid they will not last another five hundred. I do not know when I will eat or where I will sleep tonight. But it is good to be here, just walking on and on and on, too tired to worry... Eventually, it is getting dark, and I realize I have not seen any of the yellow arrows that mark the way. Am I lost? I leave my pack and trekking poles at a crossroads and scout ahead, looking for arrows. Finally I find one—but it is pointing in the direction I came from. Now I remember that I am walking the Camino backward this time. Apparently, I started at the end, in Santiago, which is why all the other pilgrims I have met have been going the other way. Walking the route backward will make the arrows more difficult to find, since they are often painted on walls facing the opposite direction. When I go to retrieve my stuff, the pack is there but the poles are missing. It looks like I will have to walk without them.

This ancient pilgrimage route called to me in the first place with a challenge to change at the deepest level—and my “backward Camino” dream illustrates what it can mean to accept such a challenge. When I want to change fundamental aspects of my life, I am going to encounter inner resistance and outer obstacles.

As in the dream, I cannot really be prepared; I am on my way before I know what I am doing. I have to trust that the supplies I will need will be available when things get desperate, but the shops (resources) are closed to me for the time being. The familiar boots I have worn on previous journeys (my habits and comforts) are all I have got, and they are getting pretty worn out. Even basics like food and sleep are uncertain. Eventually, when I come to the crossroads (choices), I have to leave my baggage and scout ahead, unburdened and unprotected, looking for arrows (directions) that are clearly marked but difficult to see. It turns out that I am following a route that is well-traveled (we are all on this journey of life together), but I am proceeding backward (in my own unique way)—and so I have to find guidance in unexpected places. When I try to retrieve my stuff (the things I think I need), the

support poles are missing. I will have to learn to walk all over again.

In waking life, my pilgrimage was entirely intentional—but my dream demonstrates how even when big change is intentionally chosen, it takes us by surprise and turns our expectations upside down (or backward).

Meeting Change in One Another

I prepare for another spiritual direction session. As I await for Aaron to arrive, I light a candle, place our chairs to face each other, adjust the room’s temperature, and make sure there are tissues at hand. I offer blessings, and ask for support from Spirit, for both of us—silently inviting myself to listen, inviting Aaron to feel welcome and at home.

My final practice before a spiritual direction session might seem a little unusual. I sit down and clear my thoughts. I visualize Aaron facing me and gaze intently at his image until I can see him as I think he really is. And then, gently and respectfully, I dissolve this image. “Aaron” turns transparent and melts away. Or perhaps there is a soft *pop* and a burst of multicolored confetti drifts to the ground where “Aaron” was. My idea of Aaron is not Aaron himself—I let it go.

In a few minutes, Aaron himself will be sitting across from me—but he may not be the person I imagined. He will be whoever he is, whoever he has become since I last saw him. If I have dropped my idea of him, there is room for him not to conform to my expectations. He can change, and I will not try to keep him as he was.

After I let go of my image of the spiritual director I am expecting, I need to let go of the spiritual director I expect to be. I imagine myself sitting across from myself—in whatever way I see myself today. Maybe I am sleepy, or anxious, or distracted, or maybe I am feeling “wise,” or maybe I imagine I am a “spiritual director.” I look carefully and nonjudgmentally at my image of myself, and then I explode that image with a loud, refreshing bang.

When Aaron comes in and sits down across from me, we are both new people. We are people who, in the presence of God, may walk together. ■

Note: Spiritual directees in this article are fictional, but their circumstances are comparable to those of real people I have met in spiritual direction.